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Allison Stephens

The Emergence from Ashes

July 2nd, 2012 is a day that is forever crystallized in my brain. The sun shined brightly as my mom and I drove home from running errands, rambling off light chatter as we made our way into the neighborhood. A block away from my home, we noticed an enormous mushroom cloud of charcoal smoke emerging from our street. With open eyes and jaws, we made our way to what we soon discovered was our home erupting in flames, the place of comfort we once knew. Billows of thick, whirling black smoke entered the sky, as tears trickling down my face burned my cheeks—similar to the flames that had engulfed my house. That summer before my sophomore year of high school, I experienced the loss of my house to a devastating fire. I had lived in that house since the age of nine, yet I could only watch helplessly as everything burned down to the foundation, as well as the memories built inside my home, smoldered away. Memories of decorating the house for holidays, playing basketball in the driveway with my brothers, sitting down to a home-cooked meal for dinner seemed to vanish before my eyes. Searching through the rubble of my home, time stood still.

A feeling of sheer hopelessness swallowed me, as I suffered from what seemed like endless emotional agony; a personal cloud of smoke, invisible to others, began to surround and suffocate me. All I desired was to go home—to rest in the soft sheets of my bed, to sit and laugh at my favorite movie as I sat on my cozy, leather couch, to be back in the secure place I called home. Yet what seemed to outweigh my feeling of hopelessness was the amount of resentment I held for the impersonal event that destroyed my life. I was enraged at the fire—the faceless entity that snatched my life away from me in a matter of minutes. I couldn't fathom how something like this could happen to me. Not seeing any good reason for my situation simply

fueled my exasperation. No form of consolation could heal the outrage that consistently kept me writhing from suppressed anger.

However, as my life began to progress, time slowly began to heal the wounds I bore. One day I realized that life is not about carrying resentment about a lifeless tragedy that can feel no remorse for you. Life is about recovering. Through my trials of hopelessness and enragement, it came to my understanding that I must grow from my experience. Prior to the emotional destruction I had gone through, I was devoted to a path of excellence. I couldn't allow a loss, even as calamitous as that one, deter me from the path that I was determined to walk. The quote "Life is going to knock you down...the difference in success and failure in life is whether or not you get up or stay down" began to hold true meaning to me. With a newfound persistence dedicated to the reconstruction of my life, I accepted the past and continued onto the success I felt destined before me. By completing my personal rehabilitation, I had finally taken back the life that was stolen from me. Now looking back, two years later, I can proudly say that after an overwhelming struggle, I am mentally and emotionally stronger, I am persistent, and I am understanding of my own nature enough to recover from any misfortune that attempts to cross my path.